

Neighborhood Crime: Correlation Between Neighborhood Upkeep and Crime Rates

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Abstract

Crime rates affect everything from home values, to the quality of education. Through the use of Social Disorganization Theory this paper will support the hypothesis that there is a correlation between neighborhood upkeep and crime rates within neighborhoods. Social Disorganization theory itself aims to show the correlation between the place in which one grows up and the likelihood that one is to deviate from social norms and participate in deviant behavior. This theory has not been applied to all types of crimes, but instead focuses on street crimes.

The independent variable is neighborhood conditions: residential turnover rates (how long people tend to live in the neighborhood), and socioeconomic status of the neighborhood (poverty rates). The longer residences live within a given neighborhood, the more likely the neighborhood is to have lower crime rates. If a neighborhood has a high turnover rate—residence move in and out frequently—the neighborhood is likely to have higher crimes rates. The dependent variable is neighborhood crimes rates, represented by street crimes. Street crimes for the purpose of this paper, includes assault,

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burglary, motor vehicle theft, and robbery. The data used to support this hypothesis comes from the Uniform Crime Report and the 2010 United States Census.

Research on the connection between neighborhood conditions and crimes rates is important because it can teach neighborhoods about the trends that bread delinquency. If the causes of delinquency can be identified, neighborhoods can be better prepared and equip to deal with, reduce, and eventually overcome neighborhood crime. This allows for measures, policies, and practices to be put in place to reduce crimes rates through neighborhood betterment and improvement programs, and intervention programs focused on at-risk-youth. At a minimum, reducing neighborhood crimes rates would improve not only the quality of life for neighborhoods, but also for the community at large.

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Introduction

Neighborhood upkeep, as defined in this paper, is the factor that keep residence in their neighborhood for long periods of time. Turn over rates, how often the population within a given neighborhood changes, influences almost everything within neighborhoods. If a neighborhood has no stability within its population, the neighborhood is at a greater risk to have high crimes rates, when compared to neighborhoods which high stability within its population.

Crime rates depend on two factors: first, that a crime is committed and second, that the crime is reported. Both of these factors are not always met, which is why crime is a difficult concept to measure. Certain crimes do have high reporting rates, and this makes measuring the impact of these crimes less of a challenge. These types of crimes, however, are usually rare crimes that aren't often considered street crimes.

This paper will use Social Disorganization Theory to examine the impact of neighborhood turn over rates on crime rates within neighborhoods, and will work to support the hypothesis that neighborhood upkeep does have an impact on neighborhood crime rates. Through continued research on this topic it can become clearer exactly what causes particular neighborhoods to have high crime rates, while others have very low crimes rates. Finding this will lead to the discussion of how to mitigate crimes rates, which will in turn have a direct impact on neighborhoods, communities, and families, and is important when trying to reduce national crimes rates.

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Theoretical Framework

Social Disorganization Theory classifies societies (social systems) as socially organized if those who live within the area have connections to the area, have lived in the area for a while, and the area has low turn over rates. A community is “. . . integrated if there is an internal consensus on its norms and values, a strong cohesion exists among its members, and social interaction proceeds in an orderly way” (Social: 141). A society is considered “disorganized or anomic if there is a disruption in its social cohesion or integration, a breakdown in social control, or malalignment among its elements” (Social: 141). Socially disorganized neighborhoods are neighborhoods which display an unwillingness to look out for ones neighbors, kids, and other community members.

Depending on whether a society is considered organized or disorganized, the residences have either strong or weak ties to the community; and whether diversion programs are available for at-risk-youth or not, can all have an effect on both the crime rates, as well as the deviance rates. All of these factors also affect turn over rates and poverty rates, which together will be referred to as neighborhood upkeep. Crime—in the context of this paper—will be any offense committed, reported to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), and published within the Uniform Crime Report. Data used to support the connection between neighborhood upkeep and crime rates within neighborhoods, will come from the 2010 United States Census and the Uniform Crime Report.

The independent concept will be conditions within the neighborhoods; the poverty rates; and turn over rates are. Each measured though the 2010 U.S. Census. Residences’ ties to the community will be measured through their mobility—more specifically, how

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long they have lived in the community. If residences within a community have resided in the community for more than a year then they are more likely to care about the neighborhood than if they just moved to the community and have yet to establish any connections.

Mobility also accounts for residents who have moved from one house to another within the same neighborhood; moved to the neighborhood from a similar neighborhood; moved from a more affluent or less affluent neighborhood; and finally, whether the resident is satisfied with their current housing and living situation. All of these factors—and many more not mentioned—contribute to whether a resident moves from neighborhood to neighborhood often, or if they stay rooted in the same community for many years, in some cases, generations. If they have been in the same community, and have therefore established roots within the community, they are more likely to look after (supervise) the youth and others who live within the same community, but whom are not directly their responsibility.

The opposite is also true: if residences have lived in their community for less than a year, they are less likely to have as strong ties to the community, when compared to those who have resided in the community for a longer period of time (more than a year). How likely one is to look out for the others within their community is very telling of how strong, or weak, their ties to the community are. This connection to the community directly impacts the youth within the given community. If youth know that most of the adults are watching them all of the time, they will become less likely to make “wrong” decisions when given the opportunity.

As recognized by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in

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their publication, *Youth Gang Programs and Strategies* notes: “[C]ommunity organization could be a major tool for reducing crime and gang problems. CAP [Chicago Area Project] was designed to involve local community groups in improving neighborhood conditions, such as the lack of supervised recreation and afterschool programs, that were believed to foster the formation of youth gangs” (Youth: 5).

This directly ties into the community’s ability to provide at-risk-youth with diversion programs that not only keep youth off the street—and in turn keep them away from ‘bad influences’ and ‘bad role models’—but will also keep the at-risk youth supervised. These supervised activities serve numerous purposes, to include: keeping the youth focused on positive activities that tend not to lead them towards deviance; ensuring that youth are not given the opportunity to commit deviate acts; and finally, provides the youth with positive roll models who encourages the community to use legitimate means to attain their goals. By fulfilling these, and other purposes, diversion programs for youth allow at-risk-youth the opportunity to change, grow, and learn before it is to late.

The crime rate within an area is dependent on crimes being reported. For this reason, crime rates and crime data cannot only be misleading, but may not always paint the entire picture. There are some crimes that are very well reported and because of this, there is very good and very reliable data available. Crimes that fall into this category include: homicide, arson, burglary, assault, robbery, and vehicle theft. Despite outstanding reporting rates of these crimes, there are other crimes that go unreported, or not reported at all: prostitution, theft, and vandalism. This can skew crime rates for certain neighborhoods.

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This is not the only problem with official crimes rates. Other problems occur when trying to define crime—this is because crime itself is hard to define broadly enough so that “all crime” fall under the definition, but be specific enough so that only “real crimes” are considered crimes. Therefore, defining crime is a problem that must be addressed before any further analysis can be made.

For the purposes of this paper, crime will be defined as any action taken—whether it be intentional or unintentional—that violated the law and, which was reported to law enforcement. Using this specific definition of crime allows this analysis to accurately measure crime using the Uniform Crime Report. “Crime is behavior that violates criminal law. It can be defined through laws, through official police reports of crime, or through victimization surveys of persons who have been involved in crime but perhaps not involved with the police department” (Sociology). By this definition of crime, a crime must not only be committed, but it also must be reported, and the law which was violated must also be known and justifiable.

Time and time again it is demonstrated that a lack of interest and investment in ones’ community can lead to a lack of organizations, which have a strong positive control of the area. This, in turn, can cause crimes rates to increase because the neighborhood is left with little to no regulation. This means that the relationship between neighborhood upkeep and crimes rates is one in which, as neighborhood upkeep decreases, crimes rates increase, and as neighborhood upkeep increase, or is maintained at a high level, crimes rates will decrease.

Literary Review

The majority of the journal articles named within this paper will support the hypothesis that there is a correlation between neighborhood upkeep and crime rates within neighborhoods. Most of the research that has been done supports this hypothesis, and has contributed to the better understanding of not only crime, but also why it is more prevalent in certain neighborhoods but almost non-existent in others. Neighborhood upkeep, the independent variable, and residential turnover rates, the preceding control, are related to one another in that if a neighborhood looks nice—it is well maintained by its residence—and is known for having and maintaining low crime rates, then its residence are going to want to continue living in the neighborhood longer. These long established “deep roots,” within the community is what gives residents’ a sense of belonging. This, in turn, gives them further reason to remain in the neighborhood. However, not all research supports this hypothesis and correlation. Such articles are also discussed in this paper.

The main effect of the correlation between neighborhood upkeep and neighborhood crime rates is supported by the journal articles: *Neighborhood Characteristics, Peer Networks, and Adolescent Violence*; *Attachment as a Source of Informal Social Control in Urban Neighborhoods*; and *Leisure Sciences: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. In all three of these articles, the author supports, in at least one way—some in two or three ways—the correlation between neighborhood upkeep and neighborhood crime rates. These articles discuss the correlation in terms of connections one has to the neighborhood, peer-to-peer relationships, neighbor to neighbor relationships, and child to adult relationships, within the neighborhood. All of these are

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vital to reducing neighborhood turnover rates and increasing a neighborhoods overall stability.

However, the journal article *Crime and Residential Choice: A Neighborhood Level of Analysis of the Impact of Crime on Housing Prices* does not support the correlation between neighborhood upkeep and crime rates. Instead, this journal article makes an argument that property crimes and violent crimes impact the housing market in the area (via housing prices) in a negative manner, which then eventually makes the area undesirable to live in, for multiple reasons. Among these reasons are the low home values dues to high crimes rates and lack of a connection to the community. These facts, which the article argues, is what causes neighborhood turnover rates, further perpetuating the crime cycle further.

The proceeding condition on the independent concept for this hypothesis is residential turnover rates and crime rates, respectively. The journal articles, which support these concepts are *Neighborhood Attachment and its Correlates: Exploring Neighborhood Conditions, Collective Efficacy and Gardening*; and *A Dynamic View of Neighborhoods: The Reciprocal Relationship Between Crime and Neighborhood Structural Characteristics*. The first journal article supports these concepts through studying neighborhood attachments and conditions by looking at the participation a community has in outdoor activities, such as gardening. The article argues that as neighborhood connectedness increases through community involvement and community activities, turn over decreases. The latter article argues for these concepts by showing that neighborhoods with high crime rates experience high levels of residential instability. This high level of instability contributes to the area becoming more economically

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disadvantaged than those around it, eventually leading to higher Africa American populations. *A Longitudinal Analysis of Neighborhood Crime Rates Using Latent Growth Curve Modeling*, however, uses vehicle theft and burglary rates to show that neighborhood characteristics, not residential turnover rates, affect crime rates. Residential turn over rates and crimes rates are important because both contribute to the decline of neighborhoods stability, which can negatively affect the community as a whole.

Crimes rates, the dependent concept, are also affected by neighborhood organizations, the control concept, are shown to have a noteworthy relationship within the journal articles: *Community (Dis)Organization and Racially Motivated Crime*; and *An Examination of Citizen Involvement in Crime Prevention in High-Risk Versus Low- to Moderate-Risk Neighborhoods*. These articles demonstrate the relationship crime rates and neighborhood organizations share through studying the reasons and circumstances that both surrounded, and lead up to, numerous and various crimes that targeted black and while victims. The effects and results of citizen involvement in crime prevention were also studied, in the latter article, and shows that neighborhoods can change—if their residents are willing to put in the time and work necessary to do so. This willingness to change their community directly strengthens connections within the neighborhood.

Contrary to this, *Local Social Ties in a Community and Crime Model: Questioning the Systematic Nature of Informal Social Controls* uses social ties to explain that a communities structure has very little impact on crime rates and cannot account for higher rates of crimes in certain areas, which neighborhoods of comparable size and geographic location does not. Neighborhood organizations play a big role in

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communities, which have the potential to become unstable, leading to high crime rates and high turn over rates—further contributing to the instability of the neighborhood.

Finally, the affect of the dependent concept, crime rates, on the intervening control, ties to both the community and programs designed for at-risk-youth, is studied and discussed in the journal articles: *Health Education & Behavior*; and *A Test of Social Disorganization Theory in High-Risk Urban Neighborhoods*. The first study demonstrates the relationship between crime rates and community ties and at-risk-youth programs through interviewing neighborhood members and learning about what the community feels is the biggest contributing factor to the communities youth becoming involved in crime. The second article reaches the same conclusion, but does so in a different manner. Instead of interviews, the researchers use regression models to estimate the effects. Any articles that make an argument against establishing programs for at-risk-youth in order to try to reduce neighborhood crime rates, could not be found at this time. The articles relating to at-risk-youth programs were all found to support this hypothesis. By establishing that communities ties and providing positive programs for at-risk-youth reduce crime rates, communities can better understand the important role that they play in not only diverting youth from participating in crime, but also positively affect the community and its overall stability in terms of turn over rates, and communities connectives.

The majority of the journal articles that were found in the course of the research for this paper fully back and supported that there is in fact a correlation between neighborhood upkeep and crime rates within neighborhoods. Very few of the journal articles which were found presented a case against this hypothesis. Because there is still

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disagreement and uncertainty within this area, there should—and undoubtedly will—be more research done.

Results

Table 1 show the three indices that were created: Crime Rates, Turn Over Rates, and Poverty Rates. Crime Rates is a measure of crime using *Assault, Burglary, and Motor Vehicle Theft, and Robbery* rates from the years 2009, 2010, and 2011. The alpha produced for the Crime Rates Index is 0.937. The Turn Over Rates Index is a measurement of the fluidity of the area—how frequent people move from one house to another. The first measurements for this index was *Housing Tenure: Housing Units: Owner-Occupied Unit*, the second is *Housing Occupancy; Total Housing Units; Occupied Housing Units*, and the third is *Residence 1 year ago; Same House; Estimate Percent*. The alpha produced for this index was 0.662.

Finally, the Poverty Index is a measurement of those whose income and resource levels are low, and who are therefore considered to be living in poverty. The first measurement for this index is *Percentage of families and people whose income in the past 12 months is below the poverty level; All families; Estimate Percent*, the second is *Employment Status; Percent Unemployed; Estimate Percent*, the third is *Income and Benefits (in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars); With cash public assistance income; With Food Stamp/SNAP benefits in the past 12 months; Estimate Percent*, and the fourth is *Income and Benefits (in 2010 inflation-adjusted dollars); With cash public assistance income; Estimate Percent*. The alpha produced for this index was 0.814.

The standard deviations, both for the individual variables and the indices, vary greatly—and range from 1.25 to 27.476 for the individual variables, and from 0.864 to 184.13442 for the indices. This demonstrates that the measures of crime; turn over rates; and poverty not only vary greatly, but that the dispersion between the results is great.

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Except for turn over rates, all of the skews are positive. This negative skew indicates that a majority of the responses and percentages were low in value, while the positive skew tells just the opposite. This is important because, when considering the questions asked, an idea of how a majority of respondents answered the question can be given. In terms of turn over rates effecting crimes rates, a positive skew tells us that there is a higher likelihood there is a positive relationship present. When turn over rates are low, crime rates are low and when turn over rates are high, crime rates are high. A negative skew tells just the opposite.

Table 2 shows the impact that Turn Over Rates has on Crime Rates. For this analysis, the index Turn Over Rates was recoded so that one groups represented “Above Average Turn Over Rates,” while the second group represented “Below Average Turn Over Rates.” When a t-table was calculated, it showed that the impact is significant (.000) at the 0.001 level. This, again, shows that as Turn Over Rates go down, so does Crime Rates. The opposite is also being true.

For Table 3, the Poverty Index was recoded, making the first group represented an “Above Average Poverty Rate,” while the second groups represented the “Below Average Poverty Rate.” The results showed that the impact of Poverty Percentages on Crime Rates is also significant (.000) at the 0.001 level. This, also, shows that there is a significant relationship between poverty rates and crime rates: as poverty rates decrease, crime rates follow.

For Table 4, a Crosstabulation was run to show the relationship between Crime Rates and Turn Over Rates, in terms of Chi-Square. The result showed the impact of Turn Over Rates on Crime Rates is significant (.000) and produced a chi square of

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18.100. In Table 5, a chi square was produced in order to find the significance of its impact of Poverty Percentages on Crime Rates. This produced a chi square of 28.549. The Crosstabulation analysis produced a significance of .000, showing that the Poverty Percentages on Crime Rates is significant at the .001 level.

Table 6...

Finally, table 7 shows the results of a regression analysis. The regression analysis produced an correlation of .412, with a variance of .17, and an adjusted R square of .158. Overall, this produced a significance of .000, showing that Turn Over Rates and Poverty Percentage does, again, have a significant impact on Crime Rates at the .001 level.

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Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max	Skew
Crime Rates						
Assault 2009	148	1.4497	1.76465	0	10	1.827
Assault 2010	148	1.0063	1.24931	0	5	1.231
Assault 2011	148	1.1208	1.37503	0	7	1.85
Burglary 2009	148	33.5503	25.31382	0	125	0.779
Burglary 2010	148	33.3423	27.07092	0	130	1.116
Burglary 2011	148	33.0805	27.47518	0	114	0.892
Motor Vehicle Theft 2009	148	26.0201	21.10862	0	116	1.075
Motor Vehicle Theft 2010	148	24.7315	18.79859	0	0.666	78
Motor Vehicle Theft 2011	148	19.953	16.62436	0	87	1.149
Robbery 2009	148	8.0403	8.04118	0	39	1.412
Robbery 2010	148	7.1074	6.86958	0	26	0.948
Robbery 2011	148	7.6846	7.47436	0	33	1.137
Crime Rates Index ($\alpha=0.937$)	148	214.1969	184.13442	0.67	1070	1.375
Turn Over Rates						
Housing Tenure: Housing Units: Owner-Occupied Units	148	56.0291	21.98142	0	95.3	-0.337
Housing Occupancy; Total Housing Units; Occupied Housing Units	148	89.1973	8.40879	0	97.6	-8.277
Residence 1 year ago; Same house; Estimate percent	148	76.7378	10.5578	32.2	97	-0.834
Turn Over Rates Index ($\alpha=0.662$)	148	0	0.77235	-4.23	1.41	-1.234
Poverty						
Percentage of families and people whose income in the past 12 months is below the poverty level; All families; Estimate Percent	148	15.0466	12.22741	0	70.5	1.174
Employment Status; Percent Unemployed; Estimate Percent	148	8.1608	4.53369	0	24	0.581
Income and Benefits (in 2010 inflation- adjusted dollars); With cash public assistance income; With Food Stamp/SNAP benefits in the past 12 months; Estimate Percent	148	12.9419	9.73192	0	40.2	0.688
Income and Benefits (in 2010 inflation- adjusted dollars); With cash public assistance income; Estimate Percent	148	3.3804	3.22074	0	15.1	1.386
Poverty Rates Index ($\alpha=0.814$)	148	0	0.86401	-1.35	2.77	0.84

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Table 2: Differences of means by Turn Over Rates on Crime Rates

Turn Over Rates	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t
Above Average Turn Over Rates	78	149.6154	153.0584	-4.59***
Below Average Turn Over Rates	70	283.8476	191.22247	

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 3: Difference of means by Poverty Percentages on Crime Rates

Poverty	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	t
Above Average Poverty Rate	63	2.3226	0.95427	5.587***
Below Average Poverty Rate	85	1.4706	0.8534	

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

Table 4: Test of Impact of Turn Over Rates on Crime Rates

	Below Average Turn Over Rates		Above Average Turn Over Rates	
Below Average Crime Rates	30	41.1%	56	75.7%
Above Average Crime Rates	43	58.9%	18	24.3%

Chi Square: 18.100

Correlation: .000***

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

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Table 5: Test of Impact of Poverty Percentages on Crime Rates

	Below Average Poverty Rates		Above Average Poverty Rates	
Below Average Crime Rates	62	78.2%	21	33.9%
Above Average Crime Rates	17	21.5%	41	66.1%

Chi Square: 28.549

Correlation: .000***

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 6: Regression Analysis of Turn Over Rates on Crimes Rates

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change	Sig.
.358	.128	.122	172.63576	21.488	.000

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	213.104	14.191		15.017	.000
Turn Over Rates	-85.459	18.436	-.358	-4.635	.000

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Table 7: Regression Analysis of Turn Over Rates and Poverty Percentages on Crimes Rates

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	F Change	Sig.
.412	.17	.158	169.067	7.229	.000

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	
(Constant)	213.104	13.897		15.334	.000
Turn Over Rates	-67.629	19.234	-.283	-3.516	.001
Poverty Percentages	46.227	17.193	.217	2.689	.008

Methods and Ethics

The data used in this paper was collected for, and published, within the 2010 United States Census, and the Uniform Crime Report. The independent variable, neighborhood upkeep, was measured through the percentage of owner-occupied units (*Housing Tenure: Housing Units: Owner-Occupied Units*), total overall housing occupancy percentages (*Housing Occupancy; Total Housing Units; Occupied Housing Units*), and how many of the residence surveyed resided in the same residence they did this time last year (*Residence 1 year ago; Same house; Estimate percent*). Each of these three measures of turn over rates examines a different aspect of turn over rates and aims to capture a greater idea of how fluid neighborhoods are.

Crime was measured by gathering data from the same sources on the number of assaults, burglaries, motor vehicle thefts, and robberies that occurred. This level of crime is consistent with street crime, and overall is a very good measures of crime rates. The crimes rates used are from the years 2009, 2010, and 2011. This allowed for not only multiple years to be studied and looked at, but it also produced a better picture of how turn over affects crime rates.

The control, poverty rates, were measured through the percentage of families and people whose income in the past 12 months was below the poverty level; employment level percentages; income and benefits with regards to public assistance programs (food stamps and SNAP); and percentage of the neighborhood who are enrolled in public cash assistances programs.

Conclusion

All of the analysis' run showed that not only does a significant relationship exist between Turn Over Rates; Poverty Percentages; and Crime Rates, but also that the relationship is significant that the at the .001 level. None of the analysis run produced anything above .000, which is well below the accepted value of .05 for determining the result is significant.

This paper was limited in its findings with respect to a few factors: First, the alpha for Turn Over Rates (0.662) was lower than desired. However, it is still a very good measure of Turn Over Rates considering Turn Over Rates is a measure that is not easily quantifiable. Second, this analysis was limited in data available and the number of cases that could be used for this analysis. Overall, there were only 148 cases which were able to be used. This is due in part to responses and what was being measured. Third, this study was limited in that some controls and other indices that were desired could either not be used, or could not be produced. This, again, goes back to the data available for this analysis. Other controls that were considered, but couldn't be used, included: rates of female heads of households, literal neighborhood upkeep and condition of the property, availability of afterschool programs for youth, and diversion programs for at-risk youth.

Crime rates is a topic that will undoubtedly see further research, as it should. This future research should include all controls and factors that could not be used within this analysis. Doing so would not only strengthen the finds, but by making the results public, would help neighborhoods to develop plans to help them mitigate the factors which are proven to have a positive relationship with crime rates. This would improve quality of

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life for the neighborhood residence, and would therefore lead to lower turn over rates, further deducing crime rates.

Crime rates have an impact on everyone, regardless of income, employment, family size, neighborhood, ethnicity, age, or gender. This is because crime rates influence everything else from home values, to rental rates, to the quality of education at local schools. There is arguably nothing that isn't impacted by crime rates. By finding ways to reduce, or do away with crime within a given neighborhood, neighborhoods could be give the opportunity to improve both the quality of live for its members, as well as for the greater community.

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